Looks can be... by PuffyPhantom

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There's something about Vlad.

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Looks can be...

Danny leaned further on his elbow, frowning as he stared down at his tray of unappetizing school food. He rolled a pea back and forth with his plastic fork as he listened to his friends chatting on the opposite side of the outdoor picnic table. “Y’know, he’s really not all that bad once you get to know him.”

Tucker and Sam stopped talking. Danny looked up from his lunch and saw that they were both staring at him.

“What?” he asked.

“Uh.” Tucker shared a concerned look with with Sam before facing Danny again. “Are we still talking about the same guy?”

“Very funny, Tuck,” Danny deadpanned.

“I’m serious!”

Danny rolled his eyes. “Yeah, I’m talking about Vlad.”

“And what makes you think he’s ‘not all that bad’?” Sam asked, crossing her arms.

“Well, I mean…” Danny gave a sheepish shrug.

Sam scoffed, shaking her head. “Danny, don’t tell me you actually believe that he’s had a sudden change of heart. People like him don’t just change overnight. Or ever.”

Danny set his fork down and straightened up in his seat. “Hey, I didn’t believe it at first either, Sam, but it’s been more than a month since he moved in with us, and there’s been no problems at all. Don’t you think that if he still had some crazy plans he would've done something already? Or I would have at least found out about them by now.”

“That’s totally what he wants you to think, dude,” Tucker said.

“Tucker is right,” Sam agreed. “He’s obviously trying to make you lower your guard. And it looks like it's working,” she said with a frown.

“Oh, what do you guys know anyway?” Danny asked, waving a hand in dismissal.

“Uh, that he has a personal vendetta against your dad and that he has the hots for your mom,” Tucker answered.

“Not anymore. I’m telling you—he’s not the same guy that he was when we first met.”

“I seriously can’t believe you’re defending him after everything that he’s done,” Sam stated incredulously.

“Yeah, well... he can’t change what he’s done, but he can change to be a better person."

“Did he tell you that, or is that something you thought of on your own?”

“Does it matter?” Danny asked bitterly.

Sam shook her head. “So, what, he’s acting suspiciously nice to your parents and *that*’s enough to convince you that he’s a good guy now?”

“No, it’s not just that. He’s nice to me, too.”

“Seriously, Danny? What does he do? Help you with your homework?” Sam asked sarcastically.

Danny glowered at Sam. “Actually, yeah. He does. That and a whole bunch of other stuff that no one else would be able to help me out with. Including you guys.”

“Huh? Like what?” Tucker asked defensively.

Danny took a cautious look around before leaning forward, lowering his voice. “He fights ghosts with me, he’s helped me get more control of my powers—”

“Hey! We’ve helped you out with that stuff, too!”

“Not like him, Tuck. This is different. And… besides all that, he… well, he just… he *gets* me.”

“He *gets* you?” Sam repeated in a sneer. “So, even though we’ve been your best friends since, like, forever, you think that some evil old creep who you’ve met less than a year ago understands you better than we do?”

Danny frowned, forcing himself to ignore Sam’s insults directed towards Vlad. “When it comes to ghost related stuff? Uh, yeah! Seriously, have either of you ever stopped and really think how hard this accident has been on me? An accident that *you* caused, in case you forgot,” he said pointedly to Sam.

Sam glared at Danny. “Really, Danny? I thought we’ve moved past this a long time ago.”

“Well, I haven’t,” Danny said sternly. “You know, I’ve tried getting used to it. And, yeah, it’s great that I can fly around and help others. But what about *me*? In the end, I’m still stuck in this weird, freaky mix of being half dead and half alive. It’s been months since the accident, and I *still* have trouble understanding it. What am I supposed to do? I can’t even go to my own parents for help, or I risk getting completely killed off by them! My own parents! Can you imagine how *that* feels?”

Sam and Tucker stayed silent.

Danny huffed. He slumped in his seat, staring somberly down at his uneaten food. “It’s nice to have at least one person out there who I can talk to and have them say ‘I know what you’re going through’ and actually mean it,” he finally said quietly, breaking the awkward silence. Though the uncomfortable tension between all of them remained unchanged.

His eyes caught the movement of Sam uncrossing her arms. She relaxed her shoulders, appearing more sympathetic than defensive now. “Danny, listen. We’re your best friends, and we’re just trying to look out for you. Maybe you’re not seeing it because of what you’re feeling, but something is definitely up with him. He’s trying to gain your trust for… *something*. I can't say what he’s thinking, but it can’t be anything good.”

Danny glared at his lunch for a moment before speaking again. “You know what’s funny?” He looked up. “Vlad told me this would happen.”

“Huh?” Tucker said.

“That what would happen?” Sam followed up.

“That you wouldn’t understand. And that you’d both try to pin me against him when he’s does nothing but help me now.”

“Hey, man, all we’re saying is that we think it’s weird that he’s had this sudden change of personality. Do you actually think that he’s trying to be a better person now?”

“Is that really so hard to believe? Why can’t you give him the opportunity to prove it? Why is it that everyone deserves a second chance except him?”

“Danny—”

“Don’t you get it? I finally have someone I can relate to! I don’t have to go through this alone anymore!” Danny abruptly stood up, grabbing his lunch tray. “If you guys really were my best friends then you’d at least try to see things from my perspective, but clearly that doesn’t seem to be the case here.”

“Danny!”

“Dude, hold up!”

Danny ignored the calls as he left, his shoes thumping against the dirt with each angry step. He hastily threw away his uneaten lunch in a nearby trash

can and all but tossed the tray on the tray holder on top before heading towards the building where his next class would be.

He couldn't wait to go home.

Notes for the Chapter:

I would love to be able to write a thorough story where Vlad slowly manipulates Danny until he has him wrapped around his finger (figuratively and literally...), but I don't have enough WD-40 to really get the gears turning for something like that, lol